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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S NEW CENTRAL ELECTION COMMITTEE

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11. (U) The Milli Mejlis (Parliament) held an extraordinary session on February 7 to designate commissioners for the new Central Election Commission, as set out in the Unified Election Code (UEC). Because ten of the 125 parliamentary seats remain vacant and will be filled through the May 13 rerun elections, the leadership of Parliament decided to fill 13 of the 18 CEC slots. The new CEC will run the May 13 rerun elections.

12. (U) According to the UEC, six CEC seats are determined by the majority party (YAP), six by independent MPs (those that ran either as independents or did not specify a party affiliation) and six by minority party MPs. (This formula is a change from the previous composition of the CEC in that a party not represented in Parliament will not be represented on election commissions). The leadership of YAP put forward the same individuals, including Mezhahir Panahov to return for another term as Chairman. The independent MPs named five of their six commissioners; three former CEC members and two new. Natiq Mammadov, an influential member of the old CEC and rumored to be a candidate for Chairman, is returning as one of two CEC secretaries. The final independent slot will be filled following

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the results of the rerun elections.

13. (U) The minority parties chose two of their six commissioners. Asim Mollazade's Democratic Reforms, Whole Azerbaijan Popular Front, and Great Creation Parties chose Tamam Jafarova, a member of the Democratic Reforms Party and a new face to the CEC. Civil Solidarity, Motherland, and Social Welfare Parties chose Rovshan Ismayilov, also a new commissioner and member of the Civil Solidarity Party.

14. (SBU) Most notably absent from the list are nominees from Musavat (whose four MPs participated for the first time during the February 7 session) and Igbal Aghazade's opposition Umid Party. It is likely that these parties will nominate candidates for the remaining four slots, but will have no voice for the May 13 reruns. Popular Front MP Jamil Hasanli is still boycotting and thus did not put forward a representative, and Rasul Guliyev's Azerbaijan Democratic Party did not win any parliamentary mandates. Should PFP and ADP continue to boycott the electoral process, as they have promised, the international community may be faced with a dilemma with the new election commissions. While structured in accordance with the law, it will be difficult to bless a new CEC that has as its only real opposition a couple of Musavat members.

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